

VZCZCXYZ3694
RR RUEHWEB

DE RUEHSQ #0174/01 0650811
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
R 050811Z MAR 08
FM AMEMBASSY SKOPJE
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC 7142
INFO RUEHZN/EUROPEAN POLITICAL COLLECTIVE 0238
RUEAIIA/CIA WASHINGTON DC
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHINGTON DC
RUESEN/SKOPJE BETA
RUEHSQ/USDAO SKOPJE MK
RHEHNSC/WHITE HOUSE NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL

UNCLAS SKOPJE 000174

SIPDIS

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SENSITIVE

DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/SCE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [OVIP](#) [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [AA](#)

SUBJECT: CODEL TANNER REVIEWS MACEDONIA'S NATO PROGRESS

Summary

¶1. (U) During CODEL Tanner's February 22 visit to Macedonia, the President, Prime Minister, and other senior Macedonian officials described recent progress in implementing NATO MAP-related reforms, noted continuing high levels of public support for NATO membership, and highlighted Macedonia's success in consistently meeting NATO standards for defense expenditures as a percentage of GDP. On the name dispute with Greece, President Crvenkovski reviewed the numerous concessions Macedonia already has made to address Greek sensitivities, while pledging to continue pursuing a mutually-agreed solution. On Kosovo, Macedonian leaders noted as key concerns border demarcation and the importance to regional stability of ensuring there is no de facto partition in northern Kosovo. End summary.

CODEL Tanner in Skopje

¶2. (U) A delegation of U.S. Congressional Representatives, led by Representative John Tanner (D-TN), visited Skopje February 22 and met separately with President Branko Crvenkovski, Prime Minister Nikola Gruevski, Deputy Minister of Defense Halimi, and CHOD Stojanovski. The members of the CODEL -- including Representatives Ben Chandler (D-KY), Carolyn McCarthy (D-NY), Jeff Miller (R-FL), Dennis Moore (D-KS), and Mike Ross (D-AR) -- thanked Macedonian officials for the country's participation in coalition operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, and reviewed Macedonia's NATO reform efforts, the name dispute with Greece, and Macedonia's support for Kosovo status.

NATO Reforms On Track

¶3. (U) During discussions with the CODEL, Macedonian officials highlighted Macedonia's progress on NATO Membership Action Plan (MAP) related reforms. President Crvenkovski described the "remarkable progress" the government and opposition had made in late 2007 in reaching consensus on key reform legislation and other actions. He said Macedonia had met all defense reform targets, and had made significant progress on political reforms. PM Gruevski highlighted Macedonia's ongoing efforts to implement the Ohrid Framework Agreement, combat corruption, modernize its military, and reform the economy. CHOD Stojanovski detailed the military reforms Macedonia had completed over the past five years, with substantial U.S. financial and technical support, including ending conscription and implementing an entirely professional force, adopting NATO standards of

interoperability, providing English language training to military officers, and instituting an effective planning process.

¶4. (U) The CODEL members thanked Macedonian officials for the country's strong support of coalition operations in Iraq and Afghanistan. Representative Miller asked Gruevski whether continued participation in coalition operations was too large a burden for Macedonia's budget, and whether there was public support for continued deployments of Macedonian troops.

Gruevski cited opinion polls indicating that 90 percent of Macedonians support NATO membership and he said the public understands the costs that accompany NATO membership.

Macedonia's participation "can be counted on for current and future missions," he said. Crvenkovski noted during his remarks that Macedonia's defense budget consistently exceeds 2 percent of GDP, meeting or exceeding the NATO standard.

Following the meeting with Stojanovski and Halimi, the CODEL met briefly with ten Macedonian soldiers who had distinguished themselves during service in international operations in Iraq, Afghanistan and Bosnia-Herzegovina.

Greece-Macedonia Name Dispute

¶5. (SBU) CODEL members raised Macedonia's negotiations with Greece regarding Macedonia's name. Crvenkovski noted that the GOM already had made a number of concessions, including amending the Macedonian constitution to renounce all territorial claims on Greece or any other neighboring country, changing its flag, and publicly renouncing any "exclusivity" over the use of the term "Macedonia."

Crvenkovski said Skopje also had accepted previous proposals by UN Special Envoy Nimetz for resolving the name issue, but Greece had not reciprocated. Crvenkovski promised that the GOM would try to reach a "common solution" to the name, but that did not mean that Macedonia could accept all of Nimitz's proposal. Gruevski underscored that the resolution of the bilateral name issue is not, and should not be, a condition for NATO membership.

Macedonia on Kosovo Independence

¶6. (SBU) On the topic of Kosovo's independence, Gruevski said that the process was unfolding much as the GOM had expected, and that he hoped Pristina and Skopje soon would be able to begin to implement demarcation of the border. Asked about any concerns, Crvenkovski expressed concern that Serbs in Mitrovica, supported by Belgrade, would not cooperate with authorities from Pristina, leading to a de facto partition of Kosovo. He argued that this would be damaging both for Kosovo and as a precedent in the region and possibly beyond. He urged the international community to be consistently clear in insisting on no de jure or de facto partition in Kosovo in order to avoid that outcome.

¶7. (U) This cable has been cleared by CODEL Tanner.
NAV RATIL